

Green Country Veteran

A JACK C. MONTGOMERY VA MEDICAL CENTER MAGAZINE

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**Profiles of Courage:
Oklahoma POWs Recall
Hardships of War**
Read this story on pg. 4.

Green Country
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official magazine for
Veterans who receive
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BARRAN TUCKER
WORLD WAR II



On the cover: A photo of Barran Tucker during World War II.

Green Country Veteran

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PROFILES OF COURAGE:

OKLAHOMA POWS RECALL HARDSHIPS OF WAR

By Nathan Schaeffer, Public Affairs Specialist

On April 5, the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center hosted a Former Prisoner of War (POW) Recognition Ceremony to honor Oklahoma's former POWs. We had the honor to speak with World War II Veterans Barran Tucker and Ralph Persun who recalled their military service and time as POWs.

now lives in Bixby, Okla. "We didn't have as many as they did. They just took the casualties and went on and bypassed the strong points. They left them for us to take care of."

Omaha Beach, approximately 7,000 yards long, was divided into several different sectors by military planners. The 175th

Oklahoma Veteran Recalls D-Day, German Atrocities

In 1943, Barran Tucker was attending high school in Spiro, Okla., when he was drafted into the U.S. Army. Instead of finishing high school, Tucker reported to Fort Sill in Oklahoma for combat training.

After training, Tucker was assigned to the 29th Infantry Division, 175th Infantry Regiment, Company G. In January 1944, the 29th Infantry Division arrived in England and was given the assignment of taking Omaha Beach on D-Day.

On June 6, 1944, 160,000 American, British and Canadian troops crossed the English Channel and began landings along a 50-mile stretch of heavily-fortified coastline in Normandy, France.

The Americans were responsible for securing Utah and Omaha Beach while the British and Canadians were responsible for Sword, Gold and Juno Beaches.

Omaha was the most heavily fortified beach, with high cliffs defended by German mortars, machine guns and artillery. Initial naval bombardments that attempted to weaken the German defenses proved ineffective.

Early in the morning on June 6, the 116th Regiment landed on Omaha Beach first while Tucker's 175th Infantry regiment remained at sea in reserve.

"The 116th, they had terrible casualties," said Tucker, who



Infantry Regiment was assigned to Dog Green Sector and Tucker said the soldiers of G-Company went ashore later that afternoon and immediately came under fire.

"Some of them got shot as we came off the landing craft," said Tucker, who was only 19 at that time and is now 89 years old.

While he was scared, Tucker said he focused on his training and the mission at hand.

"People are falling all around you," he said. "I was scared. Everybody was scared. But the training took over and you just remember all that training. But I was lucky I guess. A lot of them got killed or wounded and I got within inches of it."

A bullet grazed the side of Tucker's helmet and knocked it off his head.

"I didn't have my chin strap on or it probably would have broken my neck," he said. "It put a great big dent in (my helmet)."

The men of Company G crawled across the beach, which was filled with dead and wounded American soldiers.

"You couldn't run," said Tucker. "They were firing over our heads. If you stood up, they'd kill you. Some of them did and they got killed."

Finally, G Company reached a four to five foot tall seawall and waited until the Navy began shelling the German fortifications.

"We got up there and then they couldn't hit us," said Tucker. "So we stayed there quite a long time. The Navy started shelling, so finally we were able to move."

While the Germans took cover from the Navy bombardment, Brig. Gen.

Norman Cota, assistant commander of the 29th Infantry Division, gave the order for the Ranger Battalions to assault the Germans.

"General Cota came up there and said Rangers lead the way," said Tucker.

Combat engineers used Bangalore torpedo explosives to create gaps in the barbed wire and then the Rangers scaled the cliffs while Tucker remained under cover at the seawall.

"A few went through at a time and several of them got killed," said Tucker. "(The Germans) couldn't get all of them. So they finally got up on the cliff up there and wiped out them machine gun nests."

The cost to take Omaha was high and the U.S. suffered approximately 5,000 casualties.

Tucker Taken Captive as a POW

After the 175th Infantry Regiment pushed inland, the soldiers liberated Isigny. Next, they pushed on to Saint-Lô and the regiment attacked a bridge along the Vire River on June 13. But the Americans were outnumbered by the Germans.

The cost to take Omaha was high and the U.S. suffered approximately 5,000 casualties.

"They weren't about to give it up," said Tucker. "We never did capture it. We

assaulted it three times and they wiped us out. There was a lot more enemy and artillery up there than they estimated. How I survived, I don't know. I was in the thick of it. I came within inches of getting killed there. But they missed me."

After running out of ammunition and suffering severe casualties, Col. Paul Goode, commanding officer of the 175th Infantry Regiment, made the decision to surrender to the 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division.

"Our regimental commander had so many wounded, he surrendered to save lives," said Tucker. "We fought all day long, too. We ran out of ammunition and we had so many wounded."

However, the Germans showed no mercy to the Americans and committed horrific brutality. Tucker said the SS executed 49 American soldiers, including three Jewish Americans.





American soldiers land on Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944.



D-Day Veteran Barran Tucker attends a Former POW Recognition Ceremony at the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center on April 5.

“They singled the Jewish guys out first and had them dig their own grave,” said Tucker. “Then everyone else, they just left them laying there. The really seriously wounded, this SS officer went through and shot them in the head. They couldn’t walk.”

The Germans took the remaining soldiers to a POW camp in Mooseport, Germany and were forced to work as slave labor in a sugar beet factory. In December 1944, Tucker escaped back into France with two other soldiers.

A French family fed the soldiers and told them they could sleep in their barn. However, the family notified the SS and Tucker was captured that night.

It’s going to bring back a lot of memories. I lost a lot of friends over there.

The Germans took Tucker to a POW camp in Zeitz, Germany.

“They lined us up to shoot us several times and they had a machine gun,” he said. “You have to cock it twice and they cocked it once but they never did do it the second time. They threatened to shoot us, but they didn’t.”

In April 1945, a rumor spread around the camp that Adolf Hitler had ordered the execution of all American POWs. So Tucker escaped and was rescued by American soldiers.

When he made it home to the U.S., he weighed only 77 pounds.

"I was glad to get home," he said. "I spent a month in the hospital and they had us on a special diet, because I had stomach trouble and I have for years."

Only a private on D-Day, Tucker served 34 years in the Army and retired as a Lieutenant Colonel.

In June 2014, Tucker and his family traveled to Normandy, France to attend the 70th Anniversary of the D-Day

Invasion. It was his first trip back to Normandy since the war.

"It's going to bring back a lot of memories," he said prior to the visit. "I lost a lot of friends over there. There's a cemetery up there and a lot of them are buried in that cemetery."

Oklahoma Veteran Recalls Time as POW in Germany & Poland

During World War II, Ralph Persun served on a B-17 "Flying Fortress" as an engineer/top turret gunner with the U.S. Eighth Air Force, which was tasked

with bombing military and industrial targets in Nazi-occupied Europe and paving the way for American ground forces.

The bombing missions were so dangerous that the Army Air Force had decided that 25 missions were enough due to the physical and mental strain on the crew, and airmen would be eligible to return home to the United States.

On Sept. 11, 1944, Persun was on his 24th combat mission over the skies of Leipzig, Germany when his luck ran out.

"I don't know what the target was," said Persun, who lives in Oklahoma City. "We got a direct hit in the right



B-17 "Flying Fortress"

wing a minute and a half from bombs away. I was standing there watching it when it hit. The wing just swelled up like somebody was trying to drive a truck through it. Then it sunk back down where it should be, but it was on fire.”

The B-17 pilots immediately released their bombs and started in a slow right turn downward towards the ground.

“I started going forward and here came the radio operator and he’s on a dead run snapping on his parachute,” said Persun. “He said ‘come on, she’s going to blow’ and away he went.”

But instead of jumping immediately, Persun checked the plane to make sure the other crew members were okay.

“I looked down at the ball turret (gunner) and he’s down in there,” said Persun. “But he wasn’t moving. I got the hand crank and cranked him up. He said, ‘boy am I glad to see you.’”

Then Persun jumped and waited until he was 300 feet from the ground to release his parachute.

“I thought, that was my 24th mission and you know those Germans aren’t going to be happy to see us when we get down there,” he said. “So I just figured I’d wait awhile to open the parachute, which I did. Nobody ever saw me. Nobody ever come looking for me.”

South of Leipzig, Persun was hundreds of miles behind enemy lines. He started walking west in the hope of reaching American troops who were pushing east towards Germany. To remain undetected, he slept in the day and walked in the woods at night.

One night, he stumbled upon Buchenwald Concentration Camp.

“I walked by (Buchenwald) about 1:30 in the morning and it was just dimly lit,” he said. “I knew what it was. You could smell it.”

After walking approximately 60-70 miles, he was arrested on Oct. 3, 1944 by a civilian German policeman near Weimar, Germany, while walking along the Autobahn.

“I was tired of walking in the woods and the fields and sleeping days and walking nights,” said Persun. “After a couple of weeks, I was getting run down and weak.”



World War II Veteran Ralph Persun attends a Former POW Recognition Ceremony at the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center on April 5.

The Germans took him to an Air Force base near Weimar and then transferred him to a POW interrogation center camp in Frankfurt. Then he was transferred by train to Stalag Luft IV, a POW camp in Tychowo, Poland, for Allied airmen.

Persun had to sleep on the ground inside the camp and said the Germans didn’t patrol at night because it was so cold during the winter.



“At night, they would herd everyone in the barracks and then lock the gate and just turn the police dogs loose in the compound,” he said. “So the dogs would be prowling all night.”

Around Christmas, the Soviet Army was approaching the POW camp in Poland. So the Germans evacuated the camp and transferred Persun to Stalag Luft I, a POW camp in Barth, Germany, for Allied airmen.

On April 30, 1945, the Germans evacuated the POW camp while the Soviet Army was on the outskirts of Barth and left the POWs locked up in their cages.

“About one in the morning, I heard this bang, bang, bang,” said Persun. “It woke everybody up in prison I’m sure. It did

me. We woke up the next morning and no Germans. What they did was kill all those police dogs and they headed off to the Russian front. In the camp, there was nobody there except us.”

The next day, the Soviet Army entered the camp.

“Colonel (Hubert) Zemke was in charge of the camp from the American stand point and he just said ‘stay put,’ said Persun. “You’ve lived this long, don’t go straying around and get yourself killed. But this Russian, he had different ideas. He said ‘tear those fences down, those men are free.’ Well, when they did that, G.I.’s went every which way because there were about 9,000 POWs in that one camp.”

During May 13-15, the camp was evacuated by American aircraft during Operation Revival and the American POWs were flown to Le Havre, France, before being shipped back to the United States.

“They came in and flew us out on the 13th, which I think at that time was Mother’s Day,” said Persun. “They took the ball turrets out of the B-17s and put in plywood and took the guns off of them. They evacuated that camp in about a day and a half. They had an airplane on the runway 24 hours a day.”

Looking back on his time as a POW, he doesn’t harbor any ill will towards the Germans and he said they treated him fairly.

“They treated me fine, except there was nothing to keep you warm and nothing to eat,” he said. “That was the bad part. But the Germans didn’t have anything either. It’s war. It’s rough.” ★



New Peer Support Program Making Positive Impact

Story and photo by Nathan Schaeffer, Public Affairs Specialist

In 2012, President Obama signed an Executive Order to improve access to mental health care for Veterans and increase VA mental health staffing. Among several requirements, the President called for VA to hire 800 peer support specialists at VA hospitals and outpatient clinics nationwide.

In 2013, the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center (JCMVAMC) hired and trained five peer support specialists to work in Behavioral Medicine Service. Each “peer” is a Veteran who has recovered from a mental illness and now serves as a role model for other Veterans undergoing mental health treatment.

Dr. Alyssa Rippy, a psychologist in Behavioral Medicine Service, said research has shown that peer counselors can make a positive impact on a patient’s mental health recovery.

“The peer support specialist can say to the Veteran, ‘I know what you’re going through,’” said Rippy. “They can explain how they got better and encourage them through the recovery process. I think it’s a wonderful program and it’s been overwhelmingly successful.”

Army Veteran Charles Smiles, who struggled with alcohol during his military career, was the first peer hired by JCMVAMC last year and is able to relate to Veterans through his own recovery success story.

“I had a problem with alcohol and I had to go through therapy,” said Smiles, who retired from the Army after 20 years of service. “It almost destroyed my career in the military. I

had a real good counselor and she stuck with me.”

Today, he mentors Veterans in JCMVAMC’s Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center (PRRC), an outpatient treatment program that provides mental health services for Veterans suffering from a severe and persistent mental illness.

“I can inspire them to do well and talk to them and set an example for them,” said Smiles. “They can follow my lead like a big brother.”

Veterans in the program attend PRRRC five days a week and receive individual and group therapy, attend classes in cooking, computer and finance, exercise at

The Center for Individuals With Physical Challenges twice a week and attend a community outing every Friday.

“The majority of the Veterans (in PRRC) have been hospitalized several times,” said Rippy. “They’re really in need of a more intensive treatment than just coming in once a month or once every couple of weeks. For them, mental illness is severe almost to the point where they weren’t leaving the house. They weren’t taking care of themselves. They weren’t cooking for themselves.”

For Veterans who need transportation, Smiles and other peers pick them up and drive them home each day. He also attends each group session with the Veterans, provides one-on-one counseling and leads a group Illness Management Recovery class.

With each Veteran, he stresses the need for perseverance.



"The peer support specialist can say to the Veteran, 'I know what you're going through. They can explain how they got better and encourage them through the recovery process.'"

"You have to have confidence in yourself," said Smiles. "You're going to fall off the road sometime and that makes you learn from your mistakes. You're always going to have things that can knock you off. You have to have the courage to get back on and stay on the road."

Army Veteran Phillip Duncan, who receives treatment through PRRC for depression, said he enjoys having Smiles as a mentor.

"I look at Charles like a brother," said Duncan. "He doesn't talk at you. He talks with you."

Dr. Rippy said Smiles has made a positive difference for his fellow Veterans.

"I don't think we could have the PRRC without him," she said. "Charles has done a wonderful and amazing job. He's really there to support the Veterans all day." ★



Army Veteran Charles Smiles (left), a VA Peer Support Specialist, mentors Army Veteran Phillip Duncan.

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A photograph showing a man lying on his back on a white-covered treatment table. He is wearing a dark green t-shirt and blue jeans. A person's hands are visible, one resting on the man's shoulder and the other near his head, performing a physical therapy stretch. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a clinical setting with some equipment.

VA Occupational Therapists Help Veterans Lead Productive Lives

Story and photo by Nathan Schaeffer, Public Affairs Specialist

Julia Newberry, an occupational therapist at the Ernest Childers VA Outpatient Clinic, stretches Army Veteran Warren Jackson's shoulder to help relieve his pain.

VA occupational therapists work with Veterans who suffer from a mentally, physically, developmentally or emotionally disabling condition, and help them perform daily activities such as dressing, bathing and grooming, as well as more advanced activities such as cooking, shopping, driving, parenting and returning to work.

Julia Newberry, an occupational therapist at the Ernest Childers VA Outpatient Clinic, serves a wide range of patients from the elderly to those who were injured in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“My goal is to make them functional, help them return to daily activities, manage their pain and increase their movement, strength and mobility,” said Newberry, who is one of four occupational therapists employed by the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center.

Newberry delivers patient-centered care, which is driven by the individual needs of the Veteran.

“We first do an evaluation of what their problems are and listen to what they’re saying and where they want to be,” said Newberry. “If they don’t have goals, we encourage them and set those goals with them so they’re involved in the treatment plan.”

Then she designs a specific treatment plan based on those goals.

“If their goal is to return to work or return to school, you strengthen their skills so they can be confident and return to the work force,” she said. “For some of our elderly Veterans, their goal is to be able to get up and get dressed in the morning, to be able to take their own showers, or use the toilet.”

Newberry said it is normal for patients to become discouraged when they can’t perform daily activities such as cooking as well as they could before an injury.



“The hardest part I find is that people kind of get discouraged or depressed because they feel like they’ve lost control of something,” said Newberry. “I help them achieve a feeling of control and self-worth that they can still accomplish things no matter what the changes have been.”

For Veterans who need adaptive equipment, such as a wheelchair, she works with Prosthetics Service to get them the equipment they need and then she trains them on its proper use.

Occupational therapists also help Veterans with their physical pain.

“I treat shoulders, hands and elbows just like a physical therapist would,” said Newberry. “We do the same kind of strengthening, body mechanics and joint protection.”

Army Veteran Warren Jackson, who had multiple shoulder surgeries during his 20 years in the Army, said Newberry

has helped relieve pain in his shoulder.

“I didn’t have proper (shoulder) rotation before and she took the time to show me exactly how it works and how the shoulder actually operates,” said Jackson, a Desert Storm Veteran. “She would hit certain spots when she was stretching me and it would actually loosen everything up. She’s good and I’m not just saying that.”

Newberry is proud of her work to help Veterans and said a big part of her job is enabling them with the right tools to perform daily tasks.

“I had a patient who couldn’t spend time with his kids,” she said. “He was withdrawn and in severe pain. His vision had also changed. After working with him for three months, he was back hiking mountains, volunteering again and playing with his child. When you give them the tools, it makes a total difference in their treatment.” ★



MEMORIAL SERVICE HONORS VETERANS

Story and photo by Nathan Schaeffer, Public Affairs Specialist

Each year, the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center (JCMVAMC) holds a memorial service in January and July in the hospital auditorium to honor and remember Veteran patients who passed away during the past six months.

On July 29, approximately 125 people filled the standing room only auditorium to honor the lives of 43 Veterans.

Following prayers and sermons from VA Chaplains, JCMVAMC leadership read each Veteran's name and a Chaplain rang a bell to honor the Veteran.

Friends and family members were also invited to bring a photo of their loved one to share with those in attendance.

Chaplain Resident Sharyn Crosby said memorial services are an important part of the grieving process.

"Memorial services are important because it gives the family an opportunity to reflect over the life of their loved one," said Crosby. "While you don't get complete closure, there is some level of closure each time you reflect and each time you remember."

Crosby said the memorial service also affirms to each family that their Veteran is not forgotten.

"VA has not forgotten their loved one," said Crosby. "It is an honor for us to care and serve the Veteran and their family."

Army Veteran Brian Camp was one of those remembered that day by his wife, sister, mother and mother-in-law who drove from Tulsa to attend. Camp served in the Army in the 1980s as a nuclear warhead specialist.

Barbara Holman, his mother, said it was important for the



Barbara Holman (top left), mother, Vanna Camp (holding photo), wife, Renee Ryan (top right), sister, and June Andrews, mother-in-law, attended the memorial service to honor Army Veteran Brian Camp. Brian passed away in February.



Bonnie Pierce (right), Associate Director for Patient Care Services, reads the names of Veteran patients who passed away during the past six months.

women to attend the service to honor Brian whose life was cut short at the age of 54 in an accident.

“Anything we can do to honor Brian, we’d like to do and that’s our main reason for coming,” she said. “I was very proud of him. He was my only son. He was always smiling. He really was proud that he was a Veteran and I’m so happy that he got a lot of good attention from the (VA).”

Renee Ryan, his sister, also said Brian was proud to serve in the Army.

“VA HAS NOT FORGOTTEN THEIR LOVED ONE.”

“It was the most memorable thing in his life,” said Ryan. “(At first), he didn’t want to go (to Basic Training). He had apprehensions, but when he got there he loved it.”

Vanna Camp, his wife, also reflected on Brian’s life.

“He was a great guy,” she said. “He was friendly and funny. He could do just about anything and fix just about anything. He’s missed very much.”

The next memorial service will be held on January 27, 2015 at 1 p.m. in the hospital auditorium. ★



Chaplain Marty Luckie rings a bell after a Veteran’s name is read.

VA STAFF HONOR VETERANS, CONDUCT OUTREACH

Photos by Nita McClellan, Public Affairs Officer

The Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center (JCMVAMC) hosted its annual Veterans Appreciation Day event on July 27 during a Tulsa Shock game at the BOK Center in Tulsa.

More than 300 Veterans and their family members received a free ticket to the game against the Chicago Sky along with a meal voucher on behalf of VA and sponsors.

Prior to the game, VA staff personally thanked Veterans for their service, presented them with a commemorative coin and passed out VA health care and benefits information.

The Tulsa Shock also presented 12 Veterans with an autographed basketball during the pre-game ceremony.

Organized by the JCMVAMC Combat Care Team, the purpose of this annual outreach event is to thank Veterans for their service, educate them about VA benefits and services and encourage Veterans to enroll for VA health care. ★

Thank you to the following sponsors who helped support the Veterans Appreciation Day event: Cherokee Nation, Glacier Confection, Roadmaster & Career Path Training Corps, American Federation of Government Employees Local 2250, Healing the Heroes Foundation, Benevolent & Protective Order of Elks Wagoner Chapter.



Louis Gibson, RN, OIF/OEF Patient Advocate, thanks a Veteran for his service.



Before the game, Veterans received autographed basketballs from the Tulsa Shock.

A Ride in the Park

Story and photo by Nathan Schaeffer,
Public Affairs Specialist

The Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center (JCMVAMC) Adaptive Sports Program partnered with The Center for Individuals with Physical Challenges in Tulsa to hold an Adaptive Cycling Ride for Veterans on June 10 in Muskogee.

For two hours, Veterans and their families peddled adaptive bicycles through scenic Honor Heights Park, which were provided by The Center.

Iraq War Veteran Joseph Allwood had never ridden an adaptive bicycle before and decided to drive from Westfield, Okla., to learn more about the bicycles and spend time in the park with his family and other Veterans.

“(I came today) to have fun riding bikes, enjoy the weather and enjoy being around other Veterans,” said Allwood. “My wife encouraged me. My wife is riding a bike and my two sons are riding. I’m trying to lose weight.”

In October 2013, JCMVAMC developed an Adaptive Sports Program for Veterans with physical and visual disabilities to give them the opportunity to become involved in adaptive sports, outdoor recreation, fitness programs and leisure activity.

Since then, JCMVAMC and The Center have held several adaptive cycling clinics for Veterans in the medical center atrium. But the event on June 10 was the first held outdoors.

Vietnam Veteran David Wilson, who has participated in previous clinics at the medical center, was thrilled the ride was held in Honor Heights Park.



Vietnam Veteran David Wilson rides an adaptive bicycle on June 10 in Honor Heights Park.

“I think this is a better opportunity to really check them out,” said Wilson, who served two tours in Vietnam. “We’ve got hills and curves and longer distances.”

While Wilson exercises on a stationary bicycle at home, he said he enjoyed the opportunity to get outside and exercise with other Veterans.

“I ride a stationary bike all the time, but it gets really boring,” said Wilson. “Just being outdoors is a whole lot better than being indoors and we ended up with a decent day. We had a good turnout of Veterans.”

After the ride, Veterans and their families were treated to a cookout which was also provided by The Center.

Margie Crossno, the Program Coordinator of Adaptive Recreation and Volunteer Services for The Center, said her organization partnered with VA to educate Veterans and the public about the benefits of adaptive bicycles.

“It’s a great day to ride and anytime we can share our cycles with other

individuals and spark that interest, it’s worth it,” said Crossno. “We just like to partner with other groups and try to build community interest. Partnering with the VA has been great for us.”

Upcoming Adaptive Cycling Events

To learn about upcoming Adaptive Cycling events, contact Meghan Collins at 918-577-3874.

Interested in an Adaptive Bicycle?

Since JCMVAMC created the Adaptive Sports Program, many Veterans have expressed interest in getting an adaptive bicycle.

Eligible Veterans may be able to receive a free adaptive bicycle through VA or AMBUCS, Inc. Contact Meghan Collins at 918-577-3874 to learn more about the application process and eligibility requirements. ★

Veterans Thank VA for Excellent Care

Stories and photos by Nathan Schaeffer, Public Affairs Specialist

Veteran Says VA Saved His Life Twice

Since 1978, Air Force Veteran John Niwa has been receiving his health care at the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center (JCMVAMC).

Through the years, he has had his share of medical problems including melanoma cancer in the early 1980s and a heart attack in 2000. He said JCMVAMC has saved his life twice.

"I had a massive heart attack and they took care of me like you wouldn't believe and I'm still alive," said Niwa, who lives in Gore, Okla. and has five children.

He credits Dr. Robert Fox, a JCMVAMC Surgeon, with helping him beat melanoma cancer.

"Dr. Fox said I'll fix you up and he did," said Niwa. "The cancer is gone."

During a recent stay at JCMVAMC as an inpatient on 4 West, Niwa said he once again received excellent care. However, he also wanted to single out Nursing Assistant Carolyn Green for praise.

"I've always got really good care," said Niwa. "But the other night, Carolyn Green made me feel good although I was sick. I was so sick I wanted to cry. But she was there to wipe my tears. She deserves a real pat on the back. In fact, all of the nurses do. They do the job like the guys deserve."

Niwa said he wanted to make sure JCMVAMC staff knew he was grateful for the care he has received.

"As far as being faithful and true to the Veterans, this place is," said Niwa. "I love it. They treat me right." ★



Hanna McIntyre (left), a VA Ultrasound Technician, poses for a photo with Air Force Veteran Rick McCage at the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center on June 6

Air Force Veteran Compliments Radiology, JCMVAMC

For 32 years, Air Force Veteran Rick McCage has received his health care through VA. For 25 years, he has received his primary care at the Ernest Childers VA Outpatient Clinic in Tulsa.

On June 5, he visited the Muskogee hospital for an appointment in the Radiology Service. He was so impressed with the care he received; he stopped by the Director's Office to compliment Ultrasound Technician Hanna McIntyre and the entire Radiology Service.

"If I get outstanding care, I'm going to tell people about it," said McCage, who served from 1976 to 1982 as a medic and criminal investigator. "I just wanted people to know that I had a good experience and I'm very impressed with what I have seen."

He also said the Radiology Front Desk was very friendly and professional. In addition, he complimented the Business Office and said they were very helpful. ★



(Left to Right) Dr. Leonard Lacefield, Dr. Ricardo Aguilar, Air Force Veteran John Niwa, Dr. Robert Fox and Dr. Shanna Hampton pose for a photo at the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center on June 6.

What's YOUR Health Age?

Take the 'HealtheLiving' assessment to find out!

A powerful new tool can help Veterans better understand their health habits and overall health. It can also provide advice on ways to improve their well-being. It's called the "HealtheLiving Assessment" or "HLA" and it's now available at the My HealtheVet Web site (<https://www.myhealth.va.gov>).

The HLA asks each user a set of personalized, confidential questions. The questions cover things like diet, exercise, weight, family medical history and alcohol and tobacco use. The answers are used to calculate the Veteran's "health age" and risk for disease. All registered My HealtheVet users can take the HLA, even Veterans' family members and caregivers. It takes about 20 minutes to complete.

The HLA is interactive - users can select health recommendations, then re-calculate their health age and disease risk. This can help them understand which changes can most benefit their health. For example, users who select "stop smoking" will see a positive change in their health age and a lower risk for heart disease and some cancers.


Veterans can save or print their HLA reports to share with their health care team. This can help them better partner,

communicate and decide about their health goals. The reports can also help them see how their provider's recommendations can improve their health and life.

Research has shown that when people see the impact of their health choices, they want to improve their health behavior. And sometimes they just need is to see improvement in one area to start making bigger health and behavior changes. VA believes that the HLA can help Veterans make positive health changes to live a healthier life.

Three easy steps to Take the HealtheLiving Assessment:

1. Log in to your online account at My HealtheVet. (If you're new to My HealtheVet, you can register for an online account now.)
2. Select the The HealtheLiving assessment icon.
3. Complete the assessment and find out your health age today! ★

 **healtheliving assessment**



MOVE! Helps Veterans Manage Their Weight

Story and photos by Nathan Schaeffer, Public Affairs Specialist



Melinda Smiley, JCMVAMC MOVE! Program Coordinator, teaches a MOVE! Program class.



Vietnam Veteran Paul Papin uses a Thera-Band Exercise Band during a recent MOVE! Program Class

If you are carrying extra weight, losing it and keeping it off can be one of the best things you can do to improve your health. The best way to manage your weight is to eat wisely and be as physically active as possible.

To help Veterans manage and lose weight, VA offers MOVE!, a national weight management program.

Through individual counseling and group classes, Veterans learn how to improve their eating, exercise and behavior habits. Class topics include setting goals, meal planning, label reading, stress and emotional eating, recipe modification, shopping at the grocery store and budgeting, eating at restaurants and exercise.

“We always hear that it costs too much to eat healthy, so we show them how to shop and plan ahead,” said Melinda Smiley, JCMVAMC MOVE! Program

Coordinator. “We talk about eating out and how to make better selections, and how to make things ahead of time so you don’t always have to eat out.”

MOVE! Also Includes Brief Exercise

Each MOVE! group class involves five to 10 minutes of voluntary exercise using Thera-Band Latex Exercise Bands. The exercise bands help Veterans build body strength for both rehabilitation and fitness.

“We started doing Thera-Band exercises as a way for our patients to get just a little bit of exercise each week and it helps to motivate them to do more exercise at home,” said Smiley. “I think it just helps them realize ‘oh, I can do something.’ They really caught on to that and they like it.”

Veterans who complete the eight week MOVE! Program are given a free Thera-Band Exercise Band as an incentive and to encourage them to continue exercising at home.

“It’s an incentive to keep them coming to group because our goal is to get them here every week for eight weeks,” said Smiley. “If they come every week for eight weeks, that helps them keep that weight off and be more motivated.”

Veterans who complete the program will also receive a certificate and a weight loss graph showing their progress.

If you’re interested in starting MOVE!, talk to your VA Primary Care team. To learn more about MOVE!, visit <http://www.move.va.gov/>. ★

THE **POWER** OF VEGETABLES

By Nancy Walsh, VA Dietician

What if you saw an advertisement on television for a pill that may:

- reduce risk for heart disease, including heart attack and stroke;
- reduce cholesterol;
- protect against certain types of cancers;
- reduce the risk of obesity, and type 2 diabetes;
- lower blood pressure, and may also reduce the risk of developing kidney stones and help to decrease bone loss;
- be useful in helping to lower calorie intake;
- help improve immune function;
- protect against or help prevent erectile dysfunction?

What if this pill did not come with a long list of possible negative side effects? Would you be going to your primary care provider asking for it?

Now what if you were told that eating more vegetables, especially if colorful and/or green and leafy, may do the same thing when part of a healthy diet?

What You Eat Matters

What you eat matters, and it matters a lot. For several decades, people have lived through their childhood and adolescent years being told “Eat your vegetables.” The problem is that as a whole for today’s society, we don’t practice this imperative advice.

Every day, you need a minimum of 7-9 servings of vegetables per day, and up to 13 servings of fruits and vegetables per day.

Healthy Recipe

Kale is an amazing vegetable recognized for its exceptional nutrient richness, health benefits and delicious flavor. One cup of chopped kale contains 33 calories and 9% of the daily value of calcium, 206% of vitamin A, 134% of vitamin C, and 684% of vitamin K. It is also a good source of minerals copper, potassium, iron, manganese and phosphorus.

Try this delicious Kale Smoothie recipe! ★

KALE SMOOTHIES

HEALTHY RECIPE

Ingredients:

1 cup Dino (tuscan) Kale, packed
1 Banana
¾ cup Almond-coconut Milk
1 cup Ice

Directions:

Place all ingredients in blender and blend until smooth.

OBESITY: THE SILENT KILLER

By Dr. Uma Koduri, MD, VA Primary Care Physician

Today, more than one-third of U.S. adults are obese and nearly one in five children is obese. Overweight and obesity are defined as “abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that presents a risk to health.”

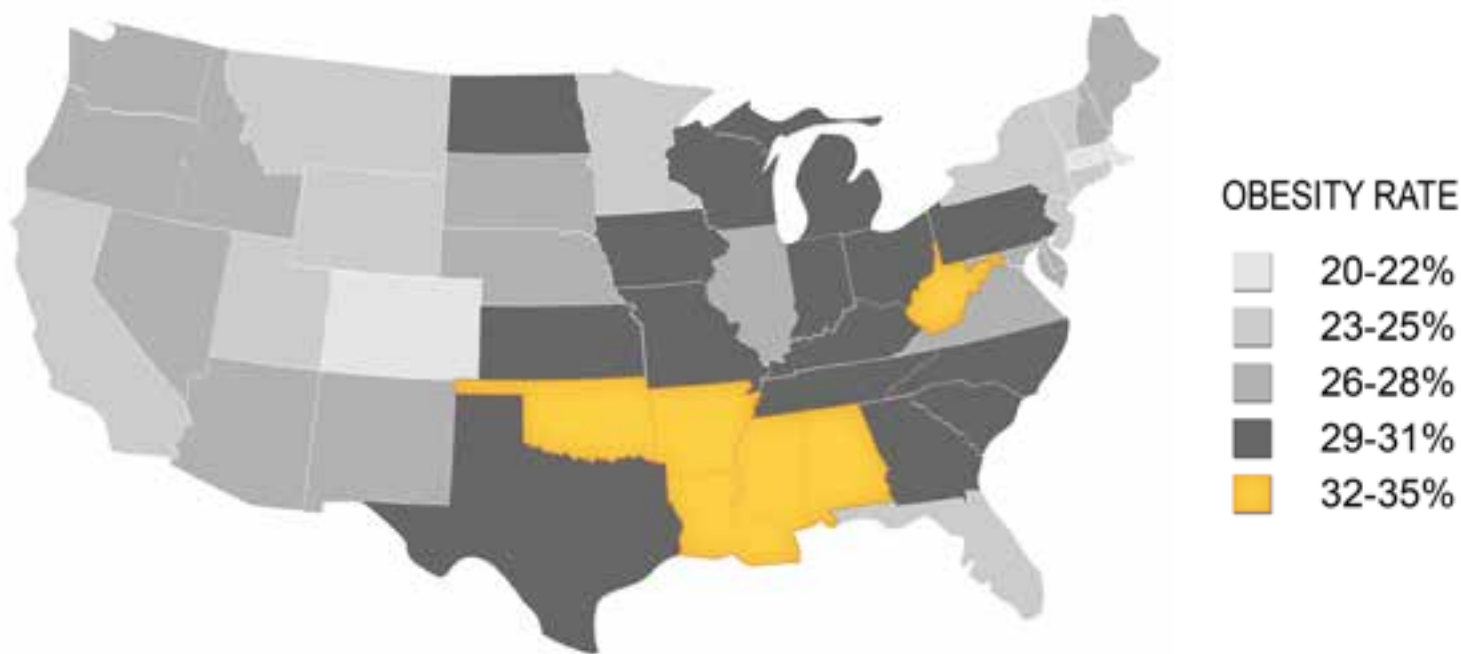
Obesity Rates in the US

This map shows the percentage of the population with a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30 or higher.

SOURCE: Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012

Hawaii

Alaska



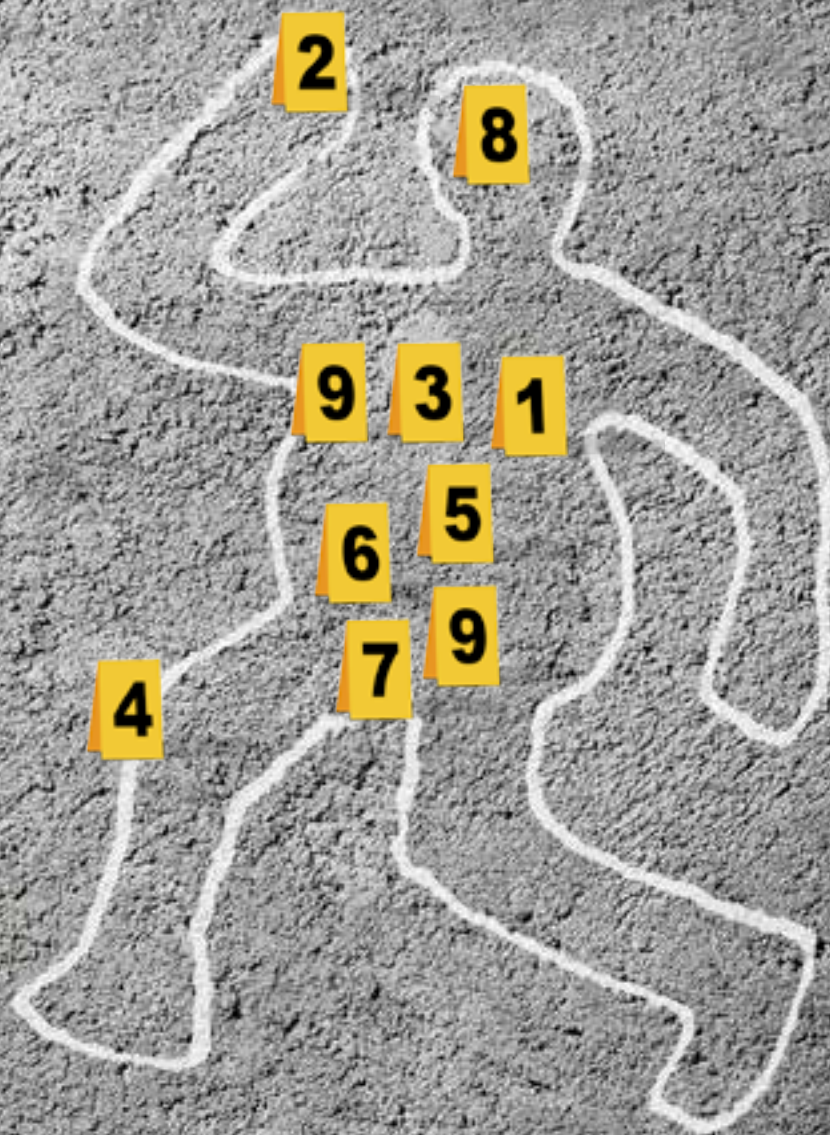
Top 10 Overweight States

1. Louisiana	34.7%	6. Oklahoma	32.2%
2. Mississippi	34.6%	7. South Carolina	31.6%
3. Arkansas	34.5%	8. Indiana	31.4%
4. West Virginia	33.8%	9. Kentucky	31.3%
5. Alabama	33.0%	10. Michigan	31.1%

The Effects of Obesity

Obesity can affect almost all organs in the body. Problems include:

1. High blood pressure and high cholesterol, which can lead to heart disease and stroke
2. Diabetes
3. Breathing problems, such as sleep apnea and asthma
4. Musculoskeletal discomfort and joint problems, especially osteoarthritis
5. Fatty liver disease, gallstones and heartburn
6. Kidney problems
7. Infertility
8. Social and psychological problems
9. Certain types of cancer (endometrial, breast and colon)



What Can You Do?

To lose weight, you have to eat less or move more. Doing both is even better.

Studies have compared different diets such as the Atkins diet, the Zone diet and the Weight Watchers diet. No single diet is better than others. Any diet that reduces the number of calories you eat can help you lose weight.

Physical activity works the same way. You can walk, dance, garden or even just move your arms while sitting. Of all sedentary behaviors, prolonged television watching appears to be the most predictive of obesity and diabetes risk.

Follow the 5-2-1-0 Concept

- 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day
- 2 hours or less of recreational screen time per day
- 1 hour or more of physical activity per day
- 0 sugary drinks per day (drink more water and low fat milk)

VA's MOVE! Program Can Help You Lose Weight

MOVE! is VA's national weight management program for Veterans. MOVE! can help you lose weight, keep it off and improve your health. During your next primary care appointment, talk to your VA doctor about MOVE! ★

MOVE! Program & Healthy Living Calendar

MOVE! Weight Management Program (MOVE!) Classes

If you are carrying extra weight, losing weight and keeping it off can be one of the best things you can do to protect your health. Excess weight puts you at risk for problems like heart disease, diabetes, some cancers, sleep apnea and gallstones. The best way to manage your weight is to eat wisely and be as physically active as possible.

VA offers the MOVE! Program, a weight self-management program for Veterans who want to improve their health. The first step is to let your VA Primary Care team know that you are interested in MOVE!

Points of Contact

Muskogee & Vinita:

Gregory Thomas, RD, at
918-577-3287.

Tulsa:

Melinda Smiley, RD/LD, at
918-628-2509.



MOVE! Introduction Class

Provides an introduction to MOVE!, VA's weight self-management program.

Muskogee:

Mondays, excluding federal holidays, at 2 p.m. in the MOVE/Nutrition office located on the 2nd floor.

Tulsa:

Mondays, excluding federal holidays, at 1 p.m. in the Boomer/Sooner Room.

MOVE! Group Class

Learn how to improve your eating, exercise and behavior habits.

Muskogee:

Wednesdays, excluding federal holidays, from 10:30 - 11:30 a.m. and 3 - 4 p.m. in the auditorium.

Tulsa:

Tuesdays, excluding federal holidays, at 10-11 a.m. or 1-2 p.m. in the Boomer/Sooner Room.

Vinita:

Thursdays, excluding federal holidays, at 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m. in the Conference Room by appointment only, class size limited.



MOVE! Support Group

Receive support from other Veterans who have participated in the MOVE! Program.

Tulsa and Vinita:

Fourth Thursday of the month at 2 p.m. in the Boomer/Sooner Room (Tulsa) and Conference Room (Vinita).

Healthy Living Classes

Diabetes/Pre-Diabetic Education

Learn survival skills for living with diabetes and improving eating habits to reduce risks. No referral is needed and spouses are encouraged to attend.

Muskogee:

Tuesdays, excluding federal holidays, at 1 p.m. in the MOVE/Nutrition office located on the 2nd floor. Contact Donna Jackson, RD, at 918-577-3287.



Tulsa:

Mondays, excluding federal holidays, at 10 a.m. in the Boomer/Sooner Room. Contact Melinda Smiley, RD/LD, at 918-628-2509.

Lipid Education

Learn how to improve your heart health through lifestyle changes.

Muskogee:

Offered on an individual basis. Contact Donna Jackson, RD, at 918-577-3287.

Tulsa:

First and Third Thursday, excluding federal holidays, at 2 p.m. in the Sooner Room. Contact Melinda Smiley, RD/LD, at 918-628-2509.

Nutrition & Wellness

Learn the basics of nutrition.

Muskogee:

Offered on an individual basis. Contact Donna Jackson, RD, at 918-577-3287.

Veterans Open Art Studio/Writing Workshop

The Open Art Studio and Writing Workshop gives Veterans an opportunity to create art or write and socialize with other Veterans.

Muskogee:

Mondays, excluding federal holidays, from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. in the auditorium. Contact Deborah Moreno at 918-577-4014 for more information.



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Penny Lund and Gail Saxon (second row in center) pose for a photo with Veterans in the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center Inpatient Rehabilitation Unit.

Women Donate Handmade Quilts, Give Hugs to Veterans

Story and photo by Nathan Schaeffer, Public Affairs Specialist

On June 6, Penny Lund and Gail Saxon drove nearly 90 minutes to the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center from Wilburton, Okla. to personally donate 11 handmade quilts to Veteran inpatients.

Lund and Saxon, who made each quilt, are not affiliated with any group or charity. They are just private citizens who wanted to give back to Veterans.

“My husband was in the service along with my Dad and my son,” said Lund. “My son suggested I do this.”

Vietnam Veteran William Wills was one of the 11 Veterans who received a quilt and he said he was honored that the women took the time to thank him for his service.

“They brought us beautiful handmade lap blankets that are absolutely gorgeous,” said Wills, who served two tours in Vietnam as a Navy Seabee. “I was very blessed and their hugs were almost as good as anything anyone could have ever given me.”

Vietnam Veteran Henry Bell also said he was grateful that Lund and Saxon honored him.

“I’m just delighted that we were honored in a very sincere, personalized basis,” said Bell who served one tour in

Vietnam with the Army. “Every time you see something like that occur, it’s really heartwarming and tear jerking. I’m not trying to speak for everyone here, but I’m really happy and I thank them a whole lot.”

Lund and Saxon said not even the downpour of rain could have deterred them from giving back to Veterans.

“It rained on us all the way, but this has been worth the whole trip in the rain,” said Lund. “It’s been so meaningful to see the Veterans get them. That’s all I have to say before I cry.” ★



The Muskogee and Tulsa clinics now offer extended hours.



We extended our hours for:

- Primary Care
- Behavioral Medicine

Primary Care (PACT) Teams will rotate weekly.

New Hours:

- Thursdays until 6:30 pm
- Saturdays 8:00 am – 2:30 pm

Veterans interested in “after hours” appointments should contact their team/clinics.

The Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center and Hartshorne, Tulsa and Vinita VA Outpatient Clinics served approximately 37,700 Veterans from a 25-county area in Eastern Oklahoma in 2013.



Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center (Muskogee)
918-577-3000 or toll free at 1-888-397-8387



Jack C. Montgomery East (Muskogee)
918-577-3699



Behavioral Medicine Clinic (Tulsa)
918-610-2000



Ernest Childers VA Outpatient Clinic (Tulsa)
918-628-2500
or toll free at 1-888-398-8387



Hartshorne VA Outpatient Clinic
888-878-1598



Vinita VA Outpatient Clinic
918-713-5400

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